United Nations S/2001/237

Security Council

Distr.: General
16 March 2001

Original: English

# Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in that country

## I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1233 (1999) of 6 April 1999, by which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed and to submit a report every 90 days on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS).

2. Members of the Council will recall that since my last report, of 29 September 2000 (S/2000/920), I addressed the Council on 29 November, in the context of the Council's open meeting to examine progress in, and constraints on, the post-conflict peace-building process in Guinea-Bissau. Following that meeting, it was agreed that my next report to the Council would be submitted at the end of March 2001.

3. In its presidential statement adopted on 29 November (S/PRST/2000/37), the Council stressed the importance of continued cooperation by all parties towards the consolidation of a sustainable peace in Guinea-Bissau and called upon the members of the former military junta to subordinate themselves fully to civilian institutions. It also reiterated that significant international assistance was indispensable in promoting the country's sustainable development.

4. The present report covers developments since that meeting, focusing on the efforts of the Government, in the wake of the failed coup d'état by the late leader of the former military junta, to preserve and strengthen the country's nascent democratic institutions in the face of persistent internal and external challenges. The report also highlights the role and activities of UNOGBIS in facilitating peace-building initiatives in the country.

## II. Political developments

5. Although the direct challenge to the constitutional order by the military appears to have decreased noticeably, the overall situation in the country has grown more unstable.

6. In the political arena, frictions and disagreements within the coalition Government have intensified and resulted in a mass resignation from the Government, on 23 January 2000, of all members of the Guinea-Bissau Resistance (RGB), the coalition partner of the Party of Social Renewal (PRS) of President Kumba Yala. The subsequent appointment by President Yala of a minority PRS Cabinet has created further political uncertainty, since that party lacks the parliamentary majority to rule alone.

7. Following fighting between rival factions of the separatist Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) in the north-west of Guinea-Bissau, the Government, claiming the need to protect Guinea-Bissau's territorial integrity, launched a military offensive against MFDC. The ensuing armed confrontation has created a tense security situation in the border area and resulted in further heavy criticism of a Government already weakened by internal crisis.

8. Over the past several weeks, attention has been focused on President Yala's attempts to form a new coalition Government, following growing demands to replace Prime Minister N'Chama. Against the

01-28822 (E) 190301

background of simmering ethnic and religious discontent, the authorities of Guinea-Bissau, on 18 February 2001, revealed that they had foiled another plot to assassinate President Yala.

9. Despite the troubling climate of tension, Guinea-Bissau continues with its efforts to consolidate its fragile democratization process. The National Assembly, which resumed its annual session on 28 February 2001, has focused its debates on the revision of the Constitution to bring it into line with the norms of a democratic society. To facilitate these debates, UNOGBIS, at the request of the Assembly, organized a seminar on the revision of the Constitution from 12 to 15 February 2001. The seminar, which brought together members of the National Assembly, representatives of political parties, civil society leaders and constitutional experts, generated dialogue on norms and principles of constitutions in multi-party systems, providing its 100 participants with the necessary expertise and advice on constitutional issues.

10. In another UNOGBIS initiative aimed at promoting the democratization process, in January 2001, participants attended a seminar on strengthening the multi-party character of democracy in Guinea-Bissau, which highlighted the principles and practices of a democratic society. At the close of the seminar, UNOGBIS donated computer systems to each of the 17 political parties that attended. Funds for the seminar and the equipment were provided by the Government of the Netherlands. An interactive seminar organized by UNOGBIS from 5 to 7 March with funding from Portugal and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was designed to increase the awareness of Guinea-Bissau's media of their important role in promoting the consolidation of a democratic culture.

11. The authorities have stepped up preparations for municipal elections due to be held in June 2001. The National Assembly is preparing the necessary legislation, while the National Electoral Commission is reviewing the delineation of provincial electoral constituencies. Owing to its difficult financial situation, the Government plans to seek donor assistance for these elections. At the Government's request, the United Nations has provided the services of an electoral expert.

## III. Military and security aspects

12. The situation along Guinea-Bissau's border with Senegal has become even more tense as MFDC fighters have increased their armed operations in pursuit of their rebellion in Casamance Province, Senegal. The movement's cross-border infiltration into the territory of Guinea-Bissau has often led to armed clashes with that country's forces, leading to heightened concerns that the provocations of the rebels are pulling Guinea-Bissau into the complex Casamance conflict. Furthermore, security officials in Bissau recently accused MFDC of involvement in a failed plot to assassinate President Yala and, in at least one instance, there was an exchange of gunfire between suspected MFDC rebels and security officers in Bissau.

13. The situation is further complicated by the presence in the border area of some 3,460 registered Casamance refugees, as there are concerns about possible links between some of them and the MFDC fighters. While a few of the Casamance refugees have voluntarily resettled in Ziguinchor, the capital of Casamance Province, the Government of Guinea-Bissau and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are exploring resettlement options for the rest of the refugees.

14. As to the Government's mine-clearance programme, an international non-governmental organization, HUMAID, has continued mine-clearing operations, facilitated by UNOGBIS and funded by the Governments of Australia, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF. Recently, following the demining of the Bra district of Bissau, mines removed from that area were detonated at a public ceremony. HUMAID, working in collaboration with the Government, civil society and volunteers, has also trained nationals of Guinea-Bissau in mine-clearing processes and continues its sensitization campaign among the civilian population.

15. Concerning the Programme of Demobilization, Reinsertion and Reintegration, the World Bank continues to provide technical and financial assistance to the Government through its economic rehabilitation and recovery credit. Definite progress has been achieved in several preparatory activities. The census of ex-combatants and paramilitary forces has been completed. The pilot demobilization project envisaged

for January 2001 has been postponed, however, owing to the delay in completing census data on the active armed forces. Military authorities attribute this delay to political instability and the volatile security situation in the north-west of the country, where MFDC is active. In the meantime, on 19 January 2001, 548 of 948 participants in the programme of voluntary demobilization, facilitated by UNOGBIS and funded by France and the Netherlands, were demobilized officially at a public ceremony. Until the pilot project, now scheduled for May 2001, begins, they will continue to receive food rations provided by the World Food Programme.

16. In the meantime, experts are finalizing arrangements and modalities for a civilian disarmament programme drawn up by UNOGBIS and other United Nations agencies represented on the ground. Donors for this project have been identified.

## IV. Economic and social aspects

17. The economy of Guinea-Bissau is in dire straits. Guinea-Bissau's main bank is threatened with bankruptcy, the fishery industry is dominated by illegal fishing and basic food items remain out of reach of the average family. To make matters worse, this year's cashew crop, the main source of State revenues, is projected to be 50 per cent less than last year's, which further decreases the Government's revenues and its capacity to pay salaries and service the external debt.

18. Owing to the Government's continuing inability to meet the most basic social needs of the population, social discontent remains high and the level of unemployment and under-employment has reached troubling proportions. As a result, with poverty remaining widespread, there has been sustained labour unrest, including strikes over unpaid wages and allowances that have accrued since the pre-conflict period. In one recent incident three persons were shot by police during a student demonstration when its participants began damaging buildings and destroying government property.

19. Aware of the acute urgency of the problems confronting Guinea-Bissau, on 15 December 2000, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank agreed to support a comprehensive debt-reduction package for the country under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. Total debt relief for Guinea-Bissau is worth about US$ 790 million in debt service relief, which is equivalent to 85 per cent of the net present value of Guinea-Bissau's debt.

20. A World Bank mission visited Bissau from 26 January to 9 February 2001 to assess the implementation of the economic rehabilitation and recovery credit. The mission also reviewed progress in the preparatory work for the poverty reduction strategy paper and discussed with the authorities of Guinea-Bissau the implementation of practical measures.

## V. Human rights

21. Given the volatile political and security situation in the country following the November coup attempt, the Government's policy of promoting respect for human rights has encountered difficulties. After an initial tense period, the Government finally released the opposition leaders and their followers who had been arrested for alleged complicity in the coup attempt. Pending their trial, they are confined to Bissau.

22. The Government continues to experience a severe lack of resources and facilities to provide both security and appropriate conditions of detention for the 150 military officers still in detention, as well as about 108 MFDC rebels captured last November for supporting the late General Mane. In addition, 11 people were recently arrested for their involvement in the alleged February plot to assassinate the President. Seven of them were also charged with collaborating with MFDC rebels. Representatives of national and international human rights and civil society organizations have paid regular visits to detainees and called for the improvement of their conditions of detention. My Representative has also visited detention centres. In collaboration with the United Nations country team, UNOGBIS has intensified efforts to ameliorate conditions of detention through the provision of basic medical care by the United Nations doctor, water holes, medically treated mosquito nets and medical supplies.

23. Despite the ongoing instability, the Government ratified several human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In support of judicial reforms, the Minister of Justice, together with my Representative, undertook a nationwide tour of judicial establishments. UNOGBIS provided, where possible, computer systems to enhance the functional capability of the judiciary.

## VI. Observations

24. Managing pressing post-crisis problems and building the foundations for a stable and functioning Government are some of the major challenges facing Guinea-Bissau.

25. The growing involvement of Guinea-Bissau in the MFDC factional fighting and the presence of Casamance refugees along the border with Senegal are causes of concern. In this connection, I wish to encourage the leaders of Guinea-Bissau and Senegal to continue their bilateral efforts to normalize the situation along their common border.

26. I urge all parties in Guinea-Bissau to engage in a constructive dialogue in order to defuse current domestic political tensions. Continuing instability could result not only in more hardship for the population but could also erode donors' confidence in the ability of the Government to manage the post-conflict transition effectively.

27. It is evident that the paucity of the country's national resources and poor infrastructure are major sources of rising social tensions. As the result of the November events and the ensuring tensions, preparations for the UNDP Round Table Conference had to be delayed. I therefore reiterate my call on the international community to provide urgent assistance to Guinea-Bissau without waiting for the Conference, so as to enable the Government to meet its pressing, short-term obligations.

28. In this connection, I commend the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for the flexibility they have displayed in providing post-recovery assistance to Guinea-Bissau. I hope that they will persevere in this direction.

29. I am grateful to those Member States that contributed through the UNOGBIS Trust Fund or through other means to the implementation of the projects outlined in this report. Their continuing assistance is critical during this difficult transitional period.

30. I also wish to thank my Representative, Samuel Nana-Sinkam, UNOGBIS staff and the entire United Nations country team for their dedication and commendable contributions to the cause of peace in Guinea-Bissau.